

## **BACKGROUND TO THE GLOBAL YOUTH TOBACCO SURVEY**

### **UNF Project**

The Tobacco Free Initiative (TFI/WHO) has recently been awarded by the United Nations Foundations for International Partnerships (UNFIP) what is probably the largest single tobacco prevention grant to initiate a joint project with UNICEF titled “Building alliances and taking action to create a generation of tobacco free children and youth”. The aim of the project is to pool together the evidence, technical support, and strategic alliances necessary to positively address the negative impact of tobacco and to encourage and support children and adolescents in leading healthy and active lives free of tobacco. The project will be focused in a small group of developing countries, one per WHO region and will draw upon the combined technical expertise and operational resources of a number of UN agencies—in particular WHO, UNICEF and the World Bank. The agencies will work together with the global scientific community, government and non-government agencies, institutions and systems within countries, the media, and with young people to show that together they can make a difference in this important public health issue.

The project is conceived as a dynamic and interactive process, whereby the activities and products of each phase will be used to inform and guide subsequent activities. The project will consist of three distinct overlapping phases. The first phase will focus on harnessing the evidence for action: synthesizing the existing evidence from countries, some of which may participate in subsequent phases; undertaking new areas of research to support actions; and establishing the research-based evidence for developing future actions.

The second phase will be the activating phase. Country Activating Groups (CAGs) with broad membership, will be formed in each of the participating countries as the coordinating and implementing mechanisms at the country levels to select and develop the components of a comprehensive country-based approach to addressing tobacco use among children and young people. Opportunities to promote the exchange of experiences and issues between countries and global activities will be developed and strengthened.

The third phase will involve taking the project to scale: producing and disseminating resources; strengthening regional capacity to sustain activities; integrating the products and results of the project into ongoing tobacco control work at the national, regional and global levels; transferring technology and experience between countries and regions; and strengthening cooperation and collaboration at all levels.

Seven countries have been selected to participate in the activating phase (Phase 2) of this project: China, Jordan, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Venezuela, Zimbabwe and Ukraine. As a first step in this Phase,

WHO and CDC organized a technical meeting in 1998 to plan for the development and implementation of an initial baseline assessment of youth tobacco use in each country using a school survey instrument: the Global Youth Tobacco Survey.

### **The GYTS**

The GYTS is a school based tobacco specific survey, which focuses on adolescents aged 13 – 15 (Forms 1 – 3). It assesses student's attitudes, knowledge and behaviors related to tobacco use and ETS exposure, as well as youth exposure to prevention curriculum in school, community programs and media messages aimed at preventing and reducing youth tobacco use. The GYTS provides information on where tobacco products are obtained and used, information related to the effectiveness of enforcement measures. School surveys are useful tools in gathering data as they are relatively inexpensive and easy to administer, tend to report reliable results, and refusals are significantly lower than in household surveys. The most common research approach for this specific population has been the self-administered questionnaire. Therefore, all the above, reasonably justify why a school-based survey has proved to be most appropriate, hence selected for the UN project on Youth and Tobacco.

### **Objectives of the GYTS**

The GYTS is a school based tobacco specific survey that focuses on students aged 13 – 15 years. The objective of this is two fold:

- 1) To document and monitor the prevalence of tobacco use including: cigarette smoking and current use of smokeless tobacco, cigars or pipes
- 2) To understand and assess students' attitudes, knowledge and behaviors related to tobacco use and its health impact, including: cessation, environmental tobacco smoke, media and advertising, minors' access and school curriculum

The GYTS will attempt to address the following issues

- Determine the level of tobacco use
- Estimate the age of initiation of cigarette use
- Estimate levels of susceptibility to become cigarette smokers
- Exposure to tobacco advertising
- Identify key intervening variables, such as attitudes and beliefs on behavioral norms with regard to tobacco use among young people which can be used in prevention programmes
- Assess the extent to which major prevention programmes are reaching school-based populations and establish the subjective opinions of those populations regarding such interventions